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University of
South Australia

International Centre for Muslim and non-Muslim Understanding

WORKING PAPER



Working Paper Number 18

Next-door strangers: Explaining 'neighbourliness' between Hindus and Muslims in a riot-affected city

Written by: Dr Raheel Dhattiwala

Nazia Ejaz ▲
Red City, 2013
120 x 90 cm
Synthetic polymer
paint on canvas

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International Centre for Muslim and non-Muslim Understanding

Next-door strangers: Explaining ‘neighbourliness’ between Hindus and Muslims in a riot-affected city

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*Working paper*²

Abstract

One of the factors demonstrated by racial or religious segregation is people’s preference for residential homophily – the tendency of like-minded people to gather in the same places. In societies disposed to ethnic conflict, homophily serves the added purpose of safety in numbers. When such conflict societies face rapid urbanization, escalated land prices accompanying the rapidly shrinking urban space veto the preference for homophily: people are unable to relocate to neighbourhoods of choice and find themselves restricted to living in mixed neighbourhoods. How do these neighbourhoods survive; what mechanisms generate cohesive neighbourly relations; and, indeed, what constitutes being a neighbour?

This paper is based on previous and ongoing ethnography in heterogeneous neighbourhoods located in three municipal wards of Ahmedabad (western India), with varying histories of ethnic violence. Findings suggest (1) spatial proximity is essential but not sufficient for positive neighbourly relations. People were more likely to develop neighbourly

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² I am grateful to Michael Biggs and Riaz Hassan for excellent insights. Participants at the ‘Diversity, Equality, Citizenship and Indian Muslims: Assessment of post Sachar Developments’, workshop held at the National University of Singapore in September 2015 provided valuable comments.

relations with people whom they encountered along daily street routes or with spatially distant co-ethnics rather than with residents in spatially proximate households (2) Hindus and Muslims collaborated in constructing superficial friendliness in public as opposed to intergroup antipathy displayed in private. Superficial friendliness with contiguous households served to assuage antipathy and ensure neighbourhood collective efficacy, as a means of survival in mixed neighbourhoods facing imminent violence, rather than explain the occurrence of violence (or peace) itself.

1. Introduction

There are several reasons why people segregate, be it by age, sex, gender, religion, colour or profession. Residential segregation can result from the interplay of unintended individual choices, such as the choice of residence being correlated with one's occupation. It can also be deliberate, as an outcome of discriminatory individual behaviour, where people consciously choose to live next to those who share their biographical characteristics (Schelling 1971). Deliberate residential segregation indicates homophily – the tendency of like-minded people to congregate in the same places (Grannis 2009). Unlike friendship relations, other primary social groups, such as neighbours and kin, have limited options in choosing matching group members (Litwak and Szelenyi 1969). In the uncertainty of the knowledge of who your neighbour would be, choices made on the basis of primordial characteristics suggest 'like-mindedness' and, subsequently, perceived to bear a greater potential for developing positive interactions and a realisation of shared norms or values. These shared norms or values imply a willingness to intervene in resolving problems arising in the neighbourhood, or 'neighbourhood efficacy' (Sampson and Wikstrom 2008).

In cities with a long history of ethnic violence, residential homophily also has the benefit of safety in numbers; people prefer to live in 'secure' co-ethnic clusters where the

opportunity of intergroup violence decreases. When such cities also urbanize rapidly the interplay of economic competition (such as for housing and jobs) with ethnic strife complicates the survival of neighbourhoods. Technologically advancing societies demand differential mobility of groups, implying a greater residential turnover. Neighbourhoods in such dynamic environments tend to persist through speedy group indoctrination: group norms state newcomers are to be welcomed and newcomers have norms that long-term residents are friends (Litwak and Szelenyi 1969). But what happens when financial and legal complications veto the choice of residential mobility? How do such mixed neighbourhoods survive and what does it mean to be neighbours, in the face of imminent violence?

This paper has two aims: first, to assess the spatial dimension of what it means to be a neighbour, by revisiting the intuitive association of spatial proximity with neighbourly relations – that is, to reassess the assumption that geographically contiguous households will be more likely to spontaneously produce positive neighbourly relations. It does so by exploring how residents, involuntarily living together in heterogeneous neighbourhoods of a conflict-affected Indian city, self-assess the concept of a neighbour using a cognitive mapping exercise. Second, it examines the survival or neighbourhood efficacy of such mixed neighbourhoods in the face of imminent violence. In this paper, I call the self-assessment of the neighbour together with neighbourhood efficacy as ‘neighbourliness’ – a term that aims to capture both individual relations between residents living within close proximity and their collective response to local crises.

The research sites are mixed neighbourhoods, comprising Hindus, Muslims and a small proportion of Christians, in three municipal wards of Ahmedabad, a city in western India infamous for its long history of violent ethnic conflict and high levels of segregation. All are working class neighbourhoods, differing only in their history of violent conflict. A majority of respondents in the mixed neighbourhoods were involuntary residents – most desired to

relocate to segregated neighbourhoods but expressed an inability to do so either out of financial (“cannot afford to move”), occupational (“my job is in this area”) or legal reasons, such as the Disturbed Areas Act, 1986 (see section 3).

Note that it is not in the purview of this paper to identify factors resulting in peace or violence in these neighbourhoods, but to explore the spatial and social meaning of what it means to be neighbours and how collective efficacy is achieved by involuntary residents of neighbourhoods bearing different political histories.

Based on ethnographic evidence, including cognitive maps, observational evidence and interviews with 101 respondents, this paper demonstrates, firstly, that spatial availability rather than spatial proximity captures the concept of a neighbour more accurately. While spatial proximity is essential for two individuals to be termed as neighbours, it is not sufficient. People are more likely to consider as neighbours those whom they encounter in daily life, either on common residential streets or on face-to-face blocks (Grannis 1998, 2009; Hassan 1977) rather than those who happen to be in a spatially contiguous household. In my research sites, respondents were asked to indicate their “favourite neighbour” using a cognitive map. Regardless of the history of violence in the research sites, over half of those who responded to the question identified their favourite neighbour as individuals living several blocks away and, in some cases, even several kilometres away from their own residence.

A majority of these self-assessed favourite or optimal neighbours were co-ethnics, but not kin. Kin ties often produce relatively close, frequent contacts among those who are at great geographic distance (Litwak and Szelenyi 1969; McPherson, Smith-Lovin and Cook 2001). Extended kin are ranked high on the variable of ascription or permanence, unlike neighbours (Parsons 1949; also, Litwak and Szelenyi, p. 471), which makes it possible for kinship structures to persist without face-to-face contact over a large distance. Because geographic

distance does not affect ascribed primary group structures, these groups are more suited to perform tasks that require long-term rather than urgent commitment. However, when ascribed groups also live in geographic proximity their ability to perform urgent tasks increases. It is possible, therefore, that the constraints on mobility in my fieldsites, discouraged kin from living in close proximity despite the willingness to do so. For these involuntary residents facing imminent violence, co-ethnicity rather than kin structures emerged as a more important factor in assessing neighbourhood relations – regardless of spatial distance. Of course, as reiterated in section 5, unless a comparison is made with involuntary residents living in a city with low or no history of ethnic conflict, this remains a tentative conclusion. What the data does establish is that people did not necessarily choose spatially proximate individuals as “beneficial” or optimal neighbours.

Secondly, there was a distinction in respondent testimonies in a group versus an individual setting. Regardless of the history of violent conflict, when interviewed in a group setting Hindus and Muslims collaborated in constructing superficial friendliness as opposed to the intergroup antipathy they displayed in individual conversations. Despite the lack of positive social relations between proximate households, the superficial friendliness among these proximate residents ensured the survival or collective efficacy of the neighbourhoods – residents came together with a common collective goal to resolve civic issues, for example. By implication, superficial neighbourly relations served to assuage antipathy, as a means of survival in mixed neighbourhoods facing imminent violence, rather than explained the occurrence of violence (or peace) itself.

2. Theory

It is necessary for human relations to occur within (or transcend) physical space, given that physical spaces are the indices of social spaces (Park 1926). Neighbourhoods are

characterised by the geographical proximity of its members and neighbours by a geographic and a functional component. Geographically, a 'neighbour' is one who lives "next door to or very near to" or "situated next to or near" the person referred to. This makes spatial proximity a necessary condition to being a neighbour and face-to-face contact between residents a natural consequence of spatially proximate households.

Functionally, neighbours are components of localised social networks working towards realising common goals and efficacious social control. It follows that 'good' neighbours would be those spatially proximate individuals who make an active contribution towards realizing shared norms of co-operation of the local residential community.³

Homophily suggests that residential patterns in a neighbourhood would, therefore, be organised on the basis of geographic proximity – if the distance between individuals X and Y is N rather than N+1, they are more likely to initiate contact, leading to potential interaction. The problem with this understanding is the implicit assumption of spatial proximity measured by linear distance, measured from point A to point B. When Park posited the link between physical and social distance, segregation studies assumed that people living in a specific geographic area are likely to have greater contact (e.g. Taeuber and Taeuber 1976). Whereas a high proportion of minority population could indeed lead to perceptions of threat, threat theory operates at a macro spatial scale, unlike segregation. A decrease in physical distance would increase the opportunity for contact (Fstinger 1950) but would not guarantee actual contact, unless contact is initiated and later sustained. For example, racial segregation in American cities could be explained by residential street networks and not by geographical distance; people of different races are located in space so as to be "down the street" rather than to be physically distant "as the crow flies" (Grannis 1998: 1559).

³ Litwak and Szelenyi (1969) argue that in technological societies faced with a high residential turnover, norms of indoctrination ensure face-to-face contact, which is essential for initiating positive neighbourly relations. Therefore, for long-surviving neighbourhoods with a low turnover, such as the fieldsites under study, a different mechanism of neighbourrelations and collective efficacy could be expected.

The mechanism can be simply explained like this: X is a *potential* neighbour of Y if X and Y are spatially proximate but only in a way that each encounters the other on the street in everyday life; X and Y can be *actual* neighbours only if they choose to initiate and then sustain contact, subsequent to the encounter. Therefore, (a) spatial proximity is essential but not sufficient to conceptualize being neighbours, (b) potential neighbours have to be spatially available not merely spatially proximate, and (c) actual neighbours do not depend solely on spatial availability.

The functional interpretation is based on the assumption that people who live close together have a greater opportunity to develop positive ties or friendly alliances as an outcome of greater interpersonal trust. Such alliances are posited as deterrents to politically motivated ethnic violence (Varshney 2001, 2002). Note, however, that the presence of positive ties does not automatically imply the presence of neighbourhood efficacy. Studies have shown that even in the absence of dense ties, such as kinship bonds and friends, neighbourhoods are able to realise common values by integrating disconnected groups because dense ties can be restrictive and discourage collective responses to local crises (Granovetter 1973; Sampson and Wikstrom 2008). Secondly, interactions need not always produce positive results. Whereas contact theory predicts a reduction in prejudice where the minority proportion is high, as an outcome of greater interaction (Allport 1954), greater contact in multiethnic neighbourhoods can also reduce interpersonal trust because people tend to ‘hunker down’ or pull back (Putnam 1995).⁴ As mentioned earlier, threat theory (Blalock 1967; Blumer 1955; Petersen 2002) is also a function of minority proportion in the population, but operates at a different spatial scale than contact theory. People may feel threatened in the presence of a higher minority population in a city – that is, at an aggregate

⁴ Putnam’s thesis is applicable to ethnic fractionalization rather than the proportion of non-majority groups. It is plausible, however, that in conflict-affected environments the presence of a significant proportion of non-majority ethnic groups could potentially generate threat and, in the long run, distrust.

spatial level – particularly if the minorities are also highly segregated (Massey, Hodson and Sekulic 1999; Biggs and Knauss 2012). This means, for mixed neighbourhoods in highly segregated cities, the effect of contact would deserve further exploration. By implication, in societies with ethnic tensions, social ties in a neighbourhood would not take on a purely geographic dimension. In a study of neighbourliness in public housing in Singapore (1977), Hassan compares voluntary and involuntary residents – those residing in the flats by choice as opposed to those not residing by choice – to find greater contact between voluntary residents. This makes it worth exploring the nature of social ties and the mechanisms of collective efficacy for involuntary groups residing in mixed neighbourhoods of segregated cities. In such a setting, hypothetically one would either expect positive social ties between spatially proximate individuals, or between spatially available individuals, or have little or no association with geographic distance. The next line of questioning would be whether and how does the nature of ties affect neighbourhood efficacy.

3. Field setting and research design

The principal research site is Ahmedabad (population: 7.2 million, Indian census 2011), the largest city of Gujarat state in western India. Prompted by its paradoxes, Spodek (2011) awarded Ahmedabad the nom de plume of the ‘shock city’ of the 21st century. For one, economic trend-spotters have called it the third fastest growing city in the world (*Forbes* 2010). Ahmedabad also stands among the worst cities in its record of Hindu-Muslim violence in independent India (Varshney 2002). The first major event of violence occurred in 1969, setting off residential segregation on Hindu-Muslim lines that increased with every subsequent incident of rioting, notably in 1985, 1986, 1990, 1992, 1993, and 2002. The violence in 2002, which claimed at least a thousand lives, mostly of Muslims, is considered the worst episode of Hindu-Muslim violence to occur in a single state in the history of

independent India, prompting Nandy (2002: 6) to liken it to “the second partition of India”. Of all urban centres in Gujarat, Ahmedabad witnessed the highest killings in 2002 – 279 or 37% of total killings in the state.⁵ Even so, 22 of 43 municipal wards remained peaceful. To explain whether perceptions of the ‘neighbour’ and mechanisms of neighbourhood efficacy in mixed neighbourhoods would vary with a varying history of violent ethnic conflict, I compare peaceful and violent neighbourhoods in three municipal wards –Behrampura, Gomtipur and Sarkhej. Neighbourhoods in each ward were mixed and working class (residents comprise Dalit Hindus, Muslims, and sometimes Dalit Christians).⁶ Table 1 in the Appendix provides an overview. Here, violence is not the centre of interest but, nonetheless, a key component in explaining varying (if at all) social relations. The violent and peaceful neighbourhoods had survived the extensive episodes of rioting in Ahmedabad – of the 101 respondents interviewed, 92 were ‘old’ residents, i.e. residing in the same neighbourhood prior to the violence in 2002. Whereas a majority of respondents expressed an inability to relocate to a neighbourhood of choice, members of both groups in these neighbourhoods did have the choice of moving within neighbourhoods. All neighbourhoods shared a legal commonality – the enforcement of the Disturbed Areas Act, 1986, which forbids the exchange of property between Hindus and Muslims (i.e. Hindus can only sell to Hindus and Muslims to Muslims) to prevent ‘distress selling’ in notified “disturbed” or riot-prone areas.⁷ By implication of the Act street-wise residential segregation by religion was less likely to change. Yet streets lined with Hindu residences could run parallel to Muslim residences. Although the Act was officially notified in 1986 its strict implementation began after the

⁵ All data on Hindu-Muslim violence in 2002 is from my doctoral thesis, compiled from *The Times of India* (see Dhattiwala and Biggs 2012 for the methodology).

⁶ The Indian Constitution specifies certain historically disadvantaged Hindu low-caste groups, formerly called ‘untouchables’, to receive affirmative action in education and employment. These are the Scheduled Castes also known as *Dalits* (“oppressed”) or SCs. Dalit Christians are converts from Hinduism or Islam and continue being referred to as Dalits.

⁷ Areas are identified as ‘disturbed’ on the basis of police jurisdiction. It is possible for smaller spatial units, e.g. neighbourhoods, falling within a larger ‘disturbed’ jurisdiction to have experienced low or negligible episodes of violence.

2002 violence. Therefore, it was possible to find Hindus houses adjacent to Muslim houses on the same street from the time before the Act came to be stringently enforced.

4. Methods

Interviews

I use qualitative methods for two reasons. First, the Indian government does not publicly release census data on the distribution of population by religion at the micro-spatial administrative unit of the ‘electoral ward’ or below (i.e. neighbourhoods). This hinders the measurement and spatial mapping of segregation. An alternative data source is electoral rolls, where names of voters can be matched to their most likely religion, either manually (Dhattiwala 2014) or systematically using name-matching algorithms (Susewind 2014; Susewind and Dhattiwala 2014). The manual method is certainly more tedious, but also more useful to explain individual level phenomenon where the intricacies of South Asian names (and their respective religion) need careful unravelling. For example, Gujarati Muslim sects, such as the Dawoodi Bohras and Khojas, often bear surnames and names similar to those of Hindus whereas a ‘Lalit Vaghela’ is as likely to be a Dalit Hindu as a Dalit Christian. To illustrate, in the Parmanand Patel neighbourhood of Gomtipur ward, a manual name-matching of 782 electors yielded 53% Hindus, 36% Muslims and 11% others (including Dalit Christians). Upon meeting respondents in person, this figure turned out to be incorrect – a substantial proportion of Hindu-sounding names were of Dalit Christians. Given the nature of this study, a more practical approach was to provide categories for each neighbourhood (“Muslim majority”, “mixed” etc.) based on the informed judgement of the ward councillors (at least one for each ward) and gatekeepers. In Gomtipur, for example, apart from one councillor, two Hindu, two Muslim and two Christian respondents were asked to assess the proportion of each religious group. Interviews were unstructured or semi-structured. Free-

flowing conversations were memorized and later reproduced as fieldnotes, as followed by ethnographers working on sensitive topics (e.g. Wood 2006).

The research questions explored neighbourliness in individual as well as a group setting to delineate the nature of individual ties from mechanisms of collective efficacy. By a group setting, I refer to an interview situation where members of different religious groups are present together. The question “Would you like to relocate to another area in the city” was explicitly asked only to respondents of Gomtipur and Makarba because the primary research questions for Ram Rahimnagar and Parikshitlalnagar were different.⁸ Even so, fieldnotes for these two neighbourhoods indicate constraints on residential mobility as well, with more respondents of PN than RRN expressing a desire to relocate.

Respondents who were new arrivals to the neighbourhoods were omitted, where the cut-off point was the Hindu-Muslim violence in 2002, i.e. those residing in the neighbourhood from the period before the violence in 2002 were classified as ‘old’. Methodologically, this ensured prior experience of violence for all residents, thereby addressing endogeneity concerns. That is, could differences in behaviour be an outcome of the presence or absence of violence? Or could the varying levels of violence be an outcome of the varying nature of interethnic relations in the neighbourhood? (Varshney 2001, 2002). Whereas residential stability would be expected to increase civic engagement, evidence from studies of homeownership and civic engagement in the US disproves this intuitive expectation; residential stability in the US increased after 1965, although civic engagement was higher during the 1950s (Putnam 1995).

The presence of involuntary residents is methodologically advantageous in that it mitigates the concern of self-selection. Self-selection means that prejudiced individuals of the majority

⁸⁸ Fieldwork in this neighbourhood was conducted in the period 2010-2015, as part of my PhD thesis. Research questions focused on explaining the presence or absence of violence and, with this objective, questions involving neighbourliness and the spatial configurations of the neighbourhoods were also asked.

group would have already chosen majority-dominated neighbourhoods, leaving behind only the less prejudiced members of their group in the heterogeneous neighbourhoods. Therefore, if there is a reduction in prejudice it may be an outcome of self-selection and not interethnic interaction.

Cognitive maps

Cognitive maps are mental representations used to make decisions about the relative positions of places in space. In an innovative application of cognitive maps, I provided each respondent with a blank paper and pen, marked with a circle indicating their own house; the respondent was then asked to sketch the location of their house in relation to that of their “favourite neighbour” (“*aapka sabse achcha padosi*” in Hindi; “*tamara mangamta paadoshi*” in Gujarati). It was emphasised to the respondent that they should identify a neighbour and not a friend. This exercise examined how respondents assessed positive neighbourly relations; how they placed themselves in relation to residents of the other community and while doing so, what verbal observations did they make. Following the sketch, the respondents were asked if the identified neighbour was a relative. Thereafter, the respondent was asked to define a neighbour. This order of questions – first the cognitive map followed by the self-assessed idea of a neighbour – avoided biasing the respondent should they be inclined (as was the case in my first interview) to sketch a location that would fit their answers to their own definition of a neighbour.

In cognitive maps, I use the term ‘spatially proximate’ neighbour as one who resides at the distance of one house, on either side or opposite the respondent; a ‘spatially available’ neighbour is one who need not be at a one-house distance from the respondent but is likely to encounter the respondent in daily routine because of the spatial pattern of the streets within the neighbourhood. The purpose of the cognitive mapping exercise was not to assess the accuracy of street locations but the respondent’s interpretation of a spatially-oriented concept.

Therefore, the distortions in judging spatial distances in cognitive maps (e.g. Lloyd 1989) is not relevant here. The cognitive mapping exercise was only conducted for respondents of Gomtipur and Makarba. Figure 1 shows a sample cognitive map.

5. Findings and implications

Spatial proximity and the neighbour: Of the total 49 respondents who were asked to identify their favourite neighbour in cognitive maps, 36 respondents gave a specific name rather than “None” or “All”. Of these, nearly three-fourth respondents (26) assessed their favourite neighbour as someone not spatially proximate. To illustrate, respondents A and B lived in neighbourhood X, such that their houses shared a common back wall. In figure 2, this is indicated by houses 1 and 5, 2 and 6, and so on. Thus, A lived in house no. 1 and B in house no. 5. Neither of the respondents self-assessed the other as a “favourite neighbour”; indeed, they stated not sharing neighbourly relations at all, an indication of how spatial boundaries can also function as social boundaries. However, respondents in houses 5, 6, 7 and 8 did profess sharing positive neighbourly relations with those in houses 9, 10, 11, and 12 of neighbourhood Y, across the street. The identified individuals were ones whom the respondents encountered regularly as a result of the spatial pattern of roads (“I can see their window from my house”: respondent living across the street said of their favourite neighbour) or out of occupational reasons.

It was emphasised to the respondent to locate neighbours and not friends. Even so, in a few cases (8), respondents identified individuals living over a kilometre away as their favourite neighbour. Three-fourths (28) of identified neighbours were co-ethnics and a majority (32) were not kin. Information constraints can prompt people to place their trust in those who share their biographical characteristics (upon asking respondents what the ‘optimal neighbour’ meant to them, interpretations centred on trust). In this case, both co-ethnicity and

spatial availability were important identifiers of the ideal neighbour rather than spatial proximity.

Neighbourhood efficacy:

Perpetrators of violent ethnic acts are often believed to be ‘outsiders’, that is, members not from the neighbourhood, thereby unknown to the victims. Because ethnic violence in India is often without redress and those convicted are very likely bailed out, victims of violence are compelled to live with perpetrators within the same neighbourhood; identifying them as the perpetrator would be at the cost of their own safety. As Jeffery and Jeffery note (Heitmeyer 2009: 111), blaming outsiders is “clearly too conveniently aimed at removing responsibility from the shoulders of all locals and encouraging a return to “normal” life which does not look too closely at local causes”. In both Gontipur and the violent neighbourhood of PN in Behrampura, where a total of 14 had been killed in 2002, there have been no convictions to date. Before fieldwork began, I expected greater distrust between Hindus and Muslims in the violent neighbourhoods than in the peaceful ones. Conversely, respondents in both the peaceful and the violent neighbourhoods professed “positive” relations with members of the other religion within the neighbourhood when interviewed in a group setting. In one-on-one conversations, respondents were more likely to display antagonistic attitudes towards members of the other religious group.

I provide two illustrations below demonstrating the differences in individual versus group interviews.

Illus. 1: Group vs. individual setting in Parmanand chali (Gontipur), violent neighbourhood

Recalling the events of 2002, Dhara (Hindu) narrates an incident of rioting.⁹ “We could not leave our houses because the Muslims would pelt stones at us”. She then looks at Munaf, a 20-year-old Muslim man and laughs, “You were one of them I know! (turns to me) But since then, Muslims and Hindus have no problems.” I meet her again a day later when she confides to me, “Because we all live together, some *vyahavar* (decorum) has to be maintained. In riots, Muslims attack us but in other times, we all come together to solve any crisis. In matters of trust, we are better off trusting our own [co-ethnic].” (Fieldnotes, Feb 18, 2015)

Illus. 2: Group vs. individual setting in Makarba gam (Sarkhej), peaceful neighbourhood

Prakashbhai (Hindu) introduces me to a local Muslim baker, Ajmal, whose shop is located two shops next to Prakashbhai’s, on the same street. “Tell her how close Hindus and Muslims are here!” Ajmal nods and says, “We are all like brothers and sisters. We come together to resolve any crisis.” I sense a tension in Ajmal’s voice and meet him again. “We don’t have *H-M* here.¹⁰ But we don’t trust each other.”

Later that week, I meet a Muslim woman who claims to have vacated her house because “my Hindu neighbour throws his trash near my front door. He thinks Muslims had pelted stones on his house (in 2002) and now wants to take revenge.”¹¹ (Fieldnotes: May 18, 2015)

It is significant, therefore, that the superficial positive ties between contiguous households did not discourage collective responses to urgent crises. To illustrate, the notoriety of the Gontipur neighbourhood, resulting from its prolific illegal liquor trade and its history of Hindu-Muslim violence, provided a means of bridging Hindu and Muslim neighbours on a collective ground. Payalben, a Hindu resident said, “We ensure our daughters are safe. Whether it’s Hindu or Muslim, we try to help if someone (woman) is stranded at dusk in our neighbourhood. Most of us know one another by name or face.”

The superficiality of “good” interpersonal relations can be interpreted as a means to avoid conflict. A high conflict region such as the American South is a more polite society yet very

⁹ Respondent names are pseudonyms; place names are unchanged.

¹⁰ “H-M” is a colloquial expression used in Ahmedabad for “Hindu-Muslim violence”, suggesting discretion. Hindus and Muslims are often referred to as “H” and “M” in public. People use the English letters although many would not know the language

¹¹ Stones were pelted in Makarba yet did not trigger a riots. Why Makarba (and RRN) were peaceful is the subject of another paper. It would suffice to note that an interplay of the credible authority of local leaders and mechanisms of monitoring and sanctioning explained the peace rather than harmonious interethnic relations.

violent – behaviours that are related to a ‘culture of honour’ (e.g. Nisbett and Cohen 1996).¹²

In societies with high levels of ethnic strife, ‘politeness’ works as a mechanism to avoid conflict, especially when compelled to live in heterogeneous neighbourhoods. But for the long-term survival of neighbourhoods, a collective response to urgent problems is essential. Where residential turnover is low and the fear of imminent intergroup violence high, it is reasonable to see why individuals would maintain superficial relations with next-door households as a means to bolster neighbourhood efficacy.

Could the superficiality of politeness be greater between Hindus and Muslims than between Hindus and Christians or Muslims and Christians because of the long history of Hindu-Muslim conflict? Aspects of neighbourhood efficacy deserve further probing during interviews. Another method would be to ask respondents to list at least five people (instead of one) whom they consider neighbours to be able to trace a detailed spatial map.

To conclude, this paper has examined the spatial and social dimensions of neighbourliness – both as positive relations between individuals in a neighbourhood and collective efficacy of the neighbourhood. A crucial aspect of the research design is that neighbourhoods of study not only differed in their history of violent conflict, but a majority of residents were forced to reside in these neighbourhoods out of constraints on mobility. Firstly, findings suggest spatial availability, rather than spatial proximity, to be a better indicator of what it means to be a neighbour. In several cases, spatial distance was overlaid by co-ethnic preferences. The paper also takes account of arguments that attribute interpersonal trust, through greater civic engagement between ethnic groups, as a deterrent to violence. Respondents in both peaceful and violent neighbourhoods differed in their behaviour when interviewed in an individual versus group setting. In both kinds of neighbourhoods, respondents publicly expressed

¹² See also Eliasoph (1998) for the different behavioural reactions to group versus individual interviews of Americans discussing politics.

positive relations with members of the other ethnic group as opposed to antagonism towards the group in private. Despite the lack of positive ties between proximate neighbours, neighbourhood efficacy was sustained through superficial engagement with proximate neighbours. By implication, conflict societies prime people to avoid routine conflict by maintaining superficial relations with contiguous neighbours, especially when residential mobility is constrained. When “neighbours kill neighbours” (Gupta 2002) in brutal ethnic massacres, as in Gujarat in 2002 or Rwanda in 1994, it becomes important to reassess what we mean by the concept of the neighbour.

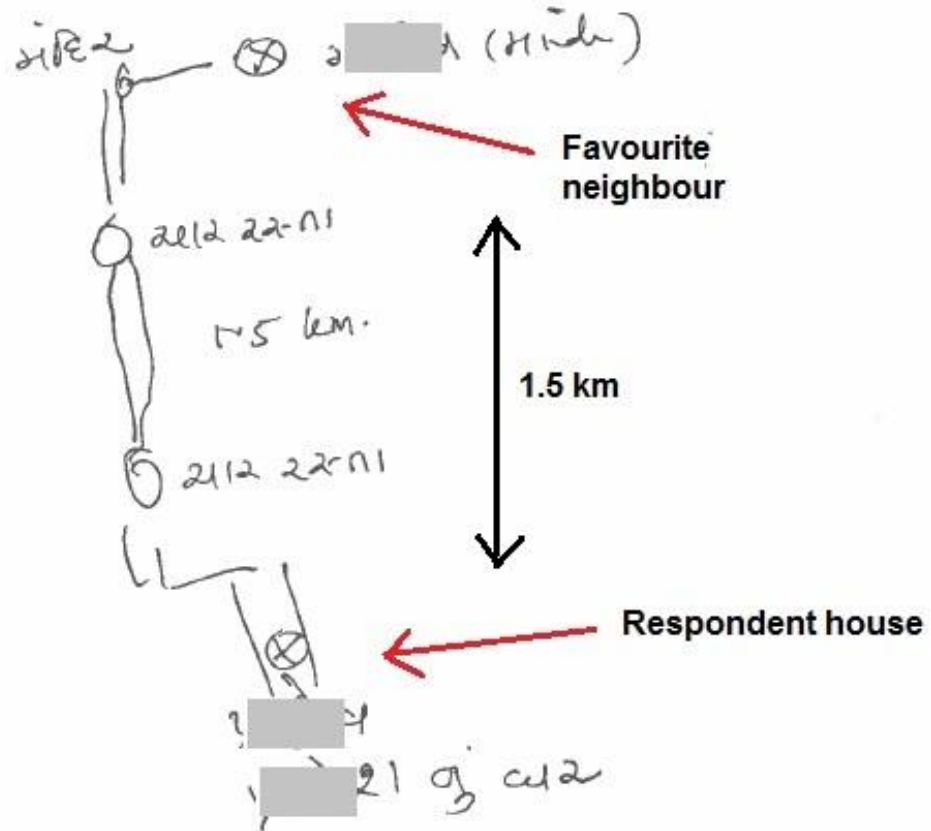
The research design ensures using evidence of only those people residing in the neighbourhoods across at least one major event of violence. Thus, the presence of common behavioural differences in both peaceful and violent neighbourhoods implies that the varying levels of violence are unlikely to be an outcome of the degree of interethnic engagement. Although resentment existed in private in all neighbourhoods, there was either peace or violence in the event of a riot trigger. It is, however, possible that an environment of ethnic tensions, generated through the history of rioting, brings about these behavioural differences. Superficial ties reduced or assuaged potential triggers from breaking out into a conflict, but did not prevent it. More interviews that probe the nature of ties as well as a comparison with neighbourhoods in a city with little or low levels of ethnic violence would be the future agenda.

Appendix

Table 1: Details of research sites in Ahmedabad city, Gujarat (India)

Sr. No.	Municipal ward	Total ward population (2011 census)	Households in ward (2011 census)	Research sites in ward	Site code	No. of respondents in site (total 101)	Religious composition
1	Gomtipur	70,015	13,347	Parmanand Patel chali	1.1	20	Mixed, with substantial Christian population
				Mansuri no. 1-3	1.2		Hindu majority
				Pithawali chali	1.3		Hindu majority
				Maniyarwada	1.4		Muslim majority
				Dhabawali chali	1.5		Mixed
2	Sarkhej	72,727	14,665	Makarba gam	2.1	11	Mixed
				Makarba Indiranagar	2.2		Hindu majority
3	Behrampura	81,636	16,164	Ram Rahimnagar	3.1	27	Mixed
				Parikshitlalnagar	3.2		23

Figure 1: Sample cognitive map



(Names of respondents are blurred for ethical reasons)

Figure 2: Street pattern in a Gomtipur neighbourhood



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